

St. George Tabernacle
(Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)
Main and Tabernacle Streets
St. George
Washington County
Utah

HABS No. U-16

HABS
UTAH

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. U-16

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UTAH

27-SAGEO

ST. GEORGE TABERNACLE
(Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)

Location: Main and Tabernacle Streets, St. George,
Washington County, Utah.
Latitude: 37° 6' 28" N Longitude: 113° 34' 59" W

Present Owner: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Present Occupant: LDS Church

Present Use: Tabernacle

Statement of
Significance: This is probably the finest remaining pioneer
Tabernacle in the state, immaculately maintained,
located in the central city of the Southern Utah
Cotton Mission.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
2. Date of erection: 1863 to 1875
3. Architect: Miles Romney
4. Builder, suppliers, etc: Quarryman: Archibald McNeil; Blacksmith: Hector McQuarrie; Stonecutters: William Fawcett, Charles L. Walker, Wilson Lund, George Brooks; Masons: Oswald Barlow, George Woodward, Lars Larson, Samuel Worthen and Sons; Chief Mason: Edward L. Parry; Woodwork and Architecture: Miles Romney; Assistant to Romney: William Barnes, Edson Barney, Willis Coplan, Hosea Stout, David Rogers; Wood turning: Benjamin Blake, Thomas Cottam, Josiah Hardy, Warren Hardy; Painting: David Milne, William Smith; Plastering: William Burt and Sons; Lime Suppliers: Samuel Judd and Sons; Tinner: C. L. Riding.
5. Notes on original plan and construction of building: Substantially as existing. Albert E. Miller describes the planned structure:

"The dimensions of the Tabernacle were to be 106 feet long and 56 wide to the outside of the main walls."

"The plans as prepared by the architect, Miles Romney, provided for a broad foundation to meet all requirements of weight for the building. The basement walls were to be three feet thick with a nine foot ceiling and a projecting water table between the basement and upper part. The main walls were to be two and one half feet through of solid masonry, high enough to allow for 29 foot ceilings. A gallery ten feet high was to extend along the north, south and east of the assembly room, supported on the north and south by nine solid turned columns and two such columns under the east end of the gallery. The front of the gallery was to be formed with a thirty-six inch paneled baluster, the part extending over supporting columns, to be paneled in artistic stucco work."

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

The building of the St. George Tabernacle marked the inauguration of a public works program planned by Brigham Young and Southern Mission Church leader Erastus Snow to bolster the spirits of the pioneer settlers after years of hardship in the area. The public announcement of his plans was read by Snow to the settlers on October 19, 1862:

"As I have already informed you, I wish you and the brethren to build, as speedily as possible a good, substantial, commodious well furnished meeting house, one large enough to comfortably seat at least 2,000 persons, and that will not only be useful, but also an ornament to your city and credit to your energy and enterprise.

I hereby place at your disposal, expressly to aid in the building of aforesaid meeting house, the labor, molasses, vegetable and grain tithing of Cedar City and all other places south of that city. I hope you will begin the building at the earliest practicable date; and be able, with the aid thereby given, to speedily prosecute the work to completion."

On June 1, 1863 the cornerstones of the tabernacle were laid, with Mormon Apostles Orson Pratt, Amasa M. Lyman and Erastus Snow officiating, assisted by Edward L. Parry, Chief Mason. Construction lagged at first, and on March 20, 1865 Erastus Snow wrote "the work upon the basement of our meeting house is substantial and progressing slowly being laid with very large flat lime rock, considered proof against the actions of the mineral in our soil and water" and on February 26, 1866, George A. Smith from Salt Lake City noted that the massive limestone foundation, was up 6 feet. Much difficulty was still being experienced with the labor force, perhaps because they were spending most of their time at the consuming effort of survival. On June 29, 1868 Erastus Snow wrote Brigham Young that "the basement story is finished, and the main floor timbers will soon be in their place," and on March 20, 1869 the first public gathering was held in the basement.

The last stone in the tower was laid at a ceremony on December 29, 1871, and one of the participants, James G. Bleak, wrote: "Saturday, December 30th the last shingle was laid on the roof of the Tabernacle this afternoon." Much work still remained to be done on the interior. On Rebruary 5, 1872 Snow reported that "a few carpenters are still at work on the Tabernacle; basement floor laid; now framing the tower." It was during 1872 or 1873 that the clock and bell were installed in the tower. Albert E. Miller states the bell was cast in Troy, New York in 1872.

The interior of the Tabernacle was finished in 1875. Andrew Larson reports that William Burt, a plaster craftsman, with his sons "did the plastering and decorations in plaster of paris and gold leaf which included artistic circles of acanthus leaves, wreathes of flowerettes, grape clusters and rosettes that adorned the walls and ceiling."

Although a reference to the formation of the mercantile firm of Woolley, Lund and Judd on October 15, 1875 reports the Tabernacle as being completed at that time, certain improvements were added thereafter. A sacrament set and organ were provided by public subscription in 1877. In April 1883, a splendid set of chandeliers was added to the lighting of the Tabernacle and in 1896 a beautiful Mason and Hamlin organ was donated by George Woodward at a reported cost of \$750.00. The completed cost of the building was reported to be \$110,000.00.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Sanborn Map of St. Geroge, Utah.

2. Bibliography:

Hafen, A. K. Beneath Vermillion Cliffs, Historic St. Geroge, published privately, St. George, Utah, 1967.

Larson, Andrew Karl. I Was Called to Dixie, The Virgin River Basin, Unique Experiences in Mormon Pioneering, Deseret News Press, 1961.

Miller, Albert. The Immortal Pioneers, Founders of City of St. Geroge, Utah, published by Albert E. Miller, 1946.

Prepared by John L. Giusti, AIA
July 26, 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest: This is probably the finest pioneer building in Utah in both design and construction.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This 55'6" x 105'3" rectangular structure has basement, first story and gallery levels and a tower and spire rising to 140 feet.
2. Foundations: Limestone faced or replaced with concrete below basement window sill level.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Red sandstone range ashlar, cut with tooled margin. Wood trim and steeple painted buff.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry with heavy timber floor, roof and steeple framing.
5. Porches and stoops: Steps to the front entrances are sixteen risers with a landing halfway; precast concrete treads imitate original red sandstone.
6. Chimneys: None now.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Front entrances have pairs of arched panel doors in deep paneled frames with panelled transom. Basement doors are all relatively new in plain sandstone openings.
 - b. Windows: First floor windows are triple hung, forty-two-over-forty-two-over-forty-two. Basement windows are double hung, eighteen-over-twelve. Above the basement level all openings have projecting sandstone pediments except for arched openings which have projecting keystones. Center window at rear has always been glazed but completely blanked from interior.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable with wood shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Heavy cornice and cornice returns with paired brackets alternating with round medallions. Tower cornice has single brackets and a five-pointed star in each circular medallion.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Partitions which create rooms along the north and south of a central open space are probably recent.
- b. Main Floor: The main floor is a large auditorium with two aisles from the entrance vestibules at the front. These are separated by the Patriarch's Room directly under the tower.
- c. Gallery: The gallery has three stepped rows of seats at the rear and both sides and connects to the choir seating on either side at the front. This connects in turn with an organ tribune and three tiers of pulpits.

2. Stairways: The spiral stairways to the gallery from the front entrances are very noteworthy; stair to basement at southwest corner of auditorium seems not to be original.

3. Flooring: Three inch pine boards exposed under pews. Aisles carpeted.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Gypsum plaster. Painted blue in auditorium, ceiling light blue-green, cornices and woodwork ivory.

5. Doorways and doors: Four and two panel doors have heavy mouldings and are set in deep panelled frames.

6. Decorative features and trim: Reredos, if the term applies, is a very strange design in wood above which is a plaster shield capped with three crowns, eye of God painted above. Pulpits are arranged in three tiers. Ceiling ornaments at light fixtures are also elaborate. Plasterwork was made possible by the discovery of a local gypsum deposit.

7. Lighting: Electric chandeliers are suspended on pulleys in location of original oil lamp chandeliers.

8. Heating: Radiators supplied from heat source outside building. Evaporative cooler and blowers in tower.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation: Faces Main Street at the east; Tabernacle Street at the north; lawns on north and east; parking at south and west.
2. Landscaping and walks: Walks from street to entrance and surrounding building.

Prepared by Paul Goeldner, AIA
Supervisory Architect
Utah Project 1968
July 17, 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This record is part of a Utah Survey conducted in the summers of 1967 and 1968 under joint sponsorship of the Historic American Buildings Survey of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation of the National Park Service and the Utah Heritage Foundation.

Field work, historic research and record drawings were done under the direction of Project Supervisor Paul Goeldner, AIA (Texas Tech University) assisted by Project Historian John Giusti, AIA (University of Utah). Photographs were made by P. Kent Fairbanks of Salt Lake City.

Student Assistant Architects on the 1967 team were Robert M. Swanson and Charles W. Barrow, (University of Texas) and Kenneth L. Lambert and Keith Sorenson, (University of Utah). 1968 Student Assistant Architects were Keith Sorenson, Charles D. Harker and Robert Schriever (University of Utah) and Donald G. Prycer, (Texas A & M University).